

Listen

A Seeker's Resource for Spiritual Direction

O C T O B E R 2 0 1 6

V O L 1 0 : I S S U E 4

RISKING CONNECTIONS

I'd been living too fast, again. Busyness threatened my health and well-being. Putting my home up for sale, a demanding work life in communications and public relations for a school district with unpredictable events requiring immediate reaction, and too many volunteer commitments were desensitizing and destabilizing my foundation. Increased global violence, polarizing political rhetoric, and a multitude of social platforms with which to "connect" all threatened chaos for me. My smartphone was becoming a curse. I know it is vital to cultivate kindness and calm in times like these. A contemplative practice—be it mindfulness, meditation, prayer, or simply a pause—becomes crucial. I recognized my inner well was empty, and even my daily focus on being thankful wasn't enough. My best self was floundering. I wasn't very present, to anyone or anything. My spiritual director had asked, "How can you take care of yourself? What familiar practices do you need to go back to, and put into place in times like these?"

My crossroads was a holiday weekend. A niece was visiting, staying with my parents who live nearby. We played on Sunday, fishing for halibut in Cook Inlet, Alaska, USA. Amid nonstop laughter, we landed several fish, then stayed up into the wee hours of the night talking. We were invited to a barbeque on Monday by a couple with three boys who we consider family.



Eurasian magpie—*Pica pica*

We would gather at their new cabin on the river a few miles from my home, and my parents would take my niece to the airport from there.

I pulled up, fatigued, my focus on the little boys who I hadn't seen in far too long, and the last precious hours with my niece. The oldest, a third grader, ran to my car to greet me, offering to help carry the bag of snacks I brought. I'd expected only our families, but a bearded man stood near a truck, offered a hello, shook my hand, and introduced himself. I flashed a smile, said, "Hello, I'm Pegge," and then turned my attention back to the eager young boy standing beside me. I had no capacity for anyone unknown. At the river, there were more people than I expected. An hour passed, then my niece and parents left for the airport while everyone else headed back to the cabin for moose burgers and salmon. I stayed at the river spot a few more minutes breathing in the sunlight and stillness, watching aqua colored water flow, and an eagle circle overhead.

On the deck, I joined conversation with several strangers. I asked the bearded man I'd met on arrival what brought him to Alaska. "I'm researching and writing a screenplay," he replied. "I'll be here several months, camping out, getting to know the people, experiencing the land." As he spoke, his entire presence radiated conviction and passion about a story encompassing World War II, the Aleutian Islands, wilderness, survival, leadership, forgiveness, and friendship. I tuned in, listening intently—body, mind, heart, and soul—and a portal opened. A great spirit of aliveness greeted me, welcoming me home to myself (I would realize this later). I drove home, mysteriously enlivened in a way I'd not experienced in years. And, I'd almost missed it—fatigue and busyness taking precedence over the connections being made available, facing me, offering invitation, from the river, family, and a bearded, stranger. 🍃

—Pegge Erkeneff

SEEDS OF INTEREST:

- 🍃 Field Guide: *SDI Learns from...*
- 🍃 Poem: *Why Not?*
- 🍃 Global Resources
- 🍃 Review: *I Am Here: Six Postures of Prayer*
- 🍃 Poem: *Dreaming a Grace*
- 🍃 Ask Owl

SDI LEARNS FROM ...

The *SDI Learns from ...* video series on YouTube and the SDI website offers more than 125 short videos. Spiritual teachers and guides from the SDI global learning community offer their wisdom, including how to seek and find a spiritual director.

INVITATION

This week, take a five to ten minute break, and select an *SDI Learns from ...* video with a topic or person who intrigues you. Then watch the video on a laptop, tablet, computer, or smart phone, opening yourself and giving permission to be surprised, inspired, affirmed, or even challenged. The variety of topics will help provide guidance to your questions and inquiry. In fact, watching the videos might give you a sample of what it would be like to meet with a spiritual director!

SDI LEARNS FROM ... SAMPLER

✦ **Wilkie Au, PhD, and Rabbi Rami Shapiro, PhD, explore spiritual direction and making prayer relevant for today**

“What’s at the heart of spiritual direction? ... If God is pervasively present in all of reality communicating God’s self to us, the role of the spiritual director is to help us tune in ...”

✦ **Rabbi Ted Falcon describes the Torah as a paradigm for spiritual awakening, and spiritual direction as a place for doubts and questions to be explored**

“One of the keynotes is helping people interpret or allow the possibility that all the events that are happening in their life, and even all the events that have happened in their lives, are in fact supporting them in their evolution. Sometimes I think spiritual direction can happen without even those words—because the words create a structure that is not always helpful. It’s helping a person become more of who they are, and trusting that who we each are is a spiritual being.”

✦ **Rev. William A. Barry, SJ, PhD, and Bernadette Miles explore the gifts of spiritual direction as they discuss Ignatian spirituality, Jesus as contemplative teacher, and spiritual companionship across traditions**

“I think Saint Ignatius was so clever at understanding the deeper human condition, really understanding how we are manipulated by our own shortcomings and spirits, our own story, and how when we come to that encounter with God in that intimate place we are freed from some of that. Slowly but surely we are released and we are more available to be present ...”

✦ **Kathleen Bryant, RSC, and Joann Kay Nesser, DMin, explore spiritual direction using technology**

“...for people that are caught up in technology, Tai Chi, and walking in nature, or hiking, or gardening and being outside where we are unhooked are the two balancing factors. ... We are all about connection in this spiritual direction enterprise, and so is the digital world.”

✦ **Carol Ludwig and Krista Tippet converse about listening, the power of generous questions, and spiritual direction**

“Listening presence is a way of honoring someone, and honoring doesn’t necessarily mean you agree with them. It doesn’t even necessarily mean that you like them. Or know them. Or feel compassionate to them. It does mean that you are going to rise to the virtue of curiosity, be willing to be surprised. And when you ask a question, you genuinely desire an answer.”

✦ **Soyinka Rahim and Cynthia Winton-Henry tell about the Race Dance and how embodied dance and prayer are acts of imagination for societal and spiritual healing**

“We have to celebrate the life force. I believe that we are all in this together. Like I really believe that all the

WWW.SDIWORLD.ORG

Listen is an outreach publication of Spiritual Directors International. When you visit the SDI website at www.sdiworld.org, you can learn about retreats, programs, conferences, and other educational events related to spiritual companionship. You can read descriptions of the spiritual direction relationship from a variety of spiritual traditions,

and discover excellent questions to ask yourself and any potential spiritual directors you choose to interview. To locate a spiritual director or guide, go online to *Seek and Find Guide: A Worldwide Resource of Available Spiritual Directors*. More than 6,000 spiritual directors are listed by geographical location at www.sdiworld.org.

FIELD NOTES, CONTINUED

racess, gender, people ... So I created this song, 'I know that you move through me, show me your rhythm to move through this world with your love, dear love.' We must celebrate the vibration of love that runs through all people."

Jamal Rahman explains prayer, the Qur'an, and how spiritual teachers and spiritual directors in the Muslim tradition provide support for learning how to be at peace with yourself

"...so when I'm in spiritual direction with someone, it is of course a collaboration. And the whole idea is to connect with his or her inner resources which are infinite. It's not a luxury, it's a necessity, and sooner or later will turn in that direction. ... We all have this longing to connect with Spirit and any help we can get to do that is very, very beneficial."

Brother David Steindl-Rast, OSB, answers questions like, *How do I pray? Where does spiritual*

guidance lead me? What are difficulties in finding a spiritual guide

"Whatever lifts up your heart, focus on that. Ask yourself, "How does that feel, and why does it come about?" Because very frequently it raises a sense of gratefulness."

Listen

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Why Not

Whoever said God stopped speaking
after dictating Revelations
hasn't stood in the woods
at dawn
in the Spring
and listened.
I've been told
God speaks in tongues,
in the wind,
through burning bushes ...
Why not bird song?
Why not the melodious voice
of wren and warbler, repetitive voice
of cuckoo, thrush and robin or the harsh calls
of rook and crow? Why not the *crick-crack*,
crick-crack, *crick-crack* of corncrakes
as they slip through reeds unseen? Why not
songs without words,
sermons without intent?
No *how* or *why*-nothing
the mind of a thinker comprehends.
Nothing the heart doesn't already know.

—Sharon Kauth, Minnesota, USA

ASK OWL

Question: *I have two questions: first, when I choose a spiritual director, does the person need to be the same faith as I am? And, secondly, do I need to believe in God to go to spiritual direction?*

Response: These are wonderful, provocative, and thought provoking questions! First of all, thank you for your willingness to listen to an inner prompting or restlessness that is drawing you towards something that might be a bit of a mystery right now, and even a bit unfamiliar. You might make some time for stillness and calm to reflect upon these questions:

- What is it about this time or season in your life that draws you to explore spiritual direction or spiritual guidance?
- Are you experiencing an inner longing or restlessness that might offer you an invitation to explore?
- Was there a time in your past when you had an experience or idea of God that was life-giving to you?

A wise teacher once said that it is important to celebrate our differences, and not to always look for the commonalities we have with one another. Therefore, sometimes it can be helpful to grow our capacity to love and know we are loved, if we choose or discern to meet with a spiritual guide who doesn't share our same faith. There are times when this is very beneficial, and expands our ideas of God, faith, and

spiritual practices. Additionally it can open connections for us to bring more aliveness, compassion, and forgiveness into our own heart, and the world. We may discover that God, or the Sacred, or the Holy One, or the wild Spirit at the center of life, becomes more mysterious, and simultaneously, more real and personal to us as we are vulnerable, and open ourselves to another person. There are also times when it is equally important for our spiritual guide to share our faith. Perhaps there are experiences and a context that wouldn't make sense—or be as easily translated to someone who doesn't share your images of God, spiritual practices, or experience of religious institution—whether it be a struggle, full of joy, or mix of both. However, a person who is trustworthy and listens to you with intention and presence is a gift.

No, you do not need to believe in God to go to spiritual direction. Sometimes, this may be a perfect time to talk with a spiritual guide. We can learn to trust our story and experiences in connection with a person who listens reverently to us, and provides an honest, transparent, holding place for us to show up and be real in sharing our doubts, disbelief, opinions, convictions, or other thoughts, perceptions, and experiences. Spiritual guidance is a place where we can listen to our longings, hopes, desires, and also our call to action and advocacy, which comes from a place of care, concern, and passion.

—If you have a question for Owl, please e-mail Listen@sdiworld.org.

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Wholehearted: A Contemplative Pilgrimage for the Soul

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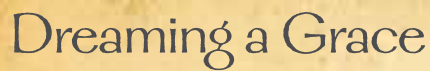
"The purpose of pilgrimage is to make life more meaningful" ~ Phil Cousineau

The urge for wholeness flows within our souls. Wholehearted, a Contemplative Pilgrimage to Ireland invites you to explore the depths of your soul as you follow the paths of the ancient peoples of the Boyne valley and monastic city of Glendalough.

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Contact don@eagleswingsministries.org,
or 8313-247-4678 with any questions or inquiries



Dreaming a Grace

I imagine listening and awakening, and holding
as precious each other
and each other's gifts and each other's dreams,
inviting each other to speak,
to show and tell stories,
to challenge and be challenged
by the arts,
to say what can only be spoken
in airy spaces,
to separate stifling rules and blinkered vision
from expansive love and kindness.

that won't tolerate stinginess,
maintaining the way things have been.

I imagine leadership that enables,
recedes from its own ego,
from the disabling power of self-doubt.

I imagine a ritual of reclaiming, reshaping
a communion of souls,
lifted and raised to the Mystery of God
the mystery of each other.

I imagine a quiet interior ‘yes,’
a buoyant ‘yes,’ risking the storms
which try to drown God’s feet in us.

I imagine daring and courage
until they are no longer such.

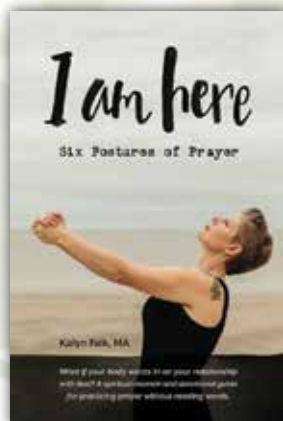
I imagine the 'yes' of Jesus
tipping tables and healing hearts,
the 'yes' disposition to all-things-God
that took him to Gethsemane.

I imagine post-resurrection people,
Pentecost people
living the unquenchable flame.

I wonder what you imagine.

6

BOOK REVIEW



***I Am Here: Six Postures of Prayer*
by Kalyn Falk**

Charleston, SC: Mykin Press, 2016

188 pages, CAD\$19.55, GBPE14.09, USD\$14.99

A funny, inviting, and tender book, author Kalyn Falk, a spiritual director, explains in the introduction, “I’m just so darn tired of apologizing and defending. I don’t want to convince you that God can meet you in your body. I’d rather just

tell you how God’s met me in mine and invite you to explore some practices that might open up a new experience for you too.” A wise guide, Falk offers ten chapters, ranging from “Disorientation” to “Reorientation,” “Expansion” and “Contraction,” “Receive,” “Stand Firm,” and “Go With The Flow,” together with photographs of postures, scripture, poetry, witty and poignant personal stories, wrestling with God and church, and questions for reflection. An example,

The posture begins by gathering the parts of yourself together and then stretching out, so it emphasizes both an inner and outer connection. Expansion is associated with joy, enthusiasm, risk-taking, willingness, and confidence. We offer ourselves wholeheartedly in this posture—not because we’re perfect, but with the full knowledge that we are inadequate. As we stretch out and feel the sense of limitedness, we also become aware of our own limitations—the realization that we’re not as graceful or limber as we’d like to be, or a sense of self-consciousness that we’re doing something our bodies

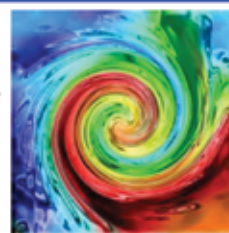
aren’t familiar with. In the spirit of expansion, we allow the Spirit to stretch us past what we know. Although we may feel exposed and self-conscious, we make an intentional choice to show ourselves. (61–62)

Questions for reflection in every chapter are the type that a spiritual director might gently ask a spiritual directee. For example, in the chapter about contraction, Falk poses, “What are you listening for? How will you know when you hear it? What practices lead you to a quiet place and slow you down? ...” (91). In the chapter, “Stand Firm,” Falk asks, “What does it feel like for you to stand your ground? Is it familiar? Energizing? Tiring?” and “What beauty do you find in firmness? When has it been a gift for you?” (147). Some of the postures and practices offer adaptations for a partner to join you, or suggest use in a retreat setting or with a group, and others are solitary.

I Am Here: Six Postures of Prayer could become a powerful daily life retreat, and Falk will be a trusted guide for spiritual seekers who desire to integrate an embodied spirituality into daily practice. Her wit, guidance, and depth will delight readers. ✍

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... Go Deeper**

“Who am I?”
“What is my purpose?”
“Who can I become?”



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“Tending the holy around the world and across traditions ...

Al servicio de lo sacro alrededor del mundo y a través de las tradiciones ...”

—Translated by Marta Rios and Xavier Ortiz Monasterio

